Recreational Trails Program

FY 2014 Grant Application Guidelines

Important Highlights

- All applications and application materials will be accepted through the new online grant management system at fundingmt.org. The funding opportunity won't be open and available online until December 3.
- New Application Deadline: 4:00 p.m. on March 1, 2014
- Grant Writing and Reimbursement Trainings are Available and Recommended

This is a complete listing of the upcoming RTP training sessions:

	<u>Dates:</u> <u>Location:</u>	<u>Time:</u>
0	January 3—Kalispell, Region 1 FWP Conference Room	9:30-12:30
0	January 9—Bozeman, Region 3 FWP Conference Room	9:30-12:30
0	January 10—Helena, FWP HQ Commission Rooms	12:00-3:30
0	January 14—Missoula, Region 2 FWP Conference Roor	n 9:30-12:30
0	January 16—Great Falls, Region 4 FWP Conference Ro	om 9:30-12:30

- Cost-Share Program: 80% Recreational Trails Program Funds; 20% Sponsor Funds
 Federal grant sponsors must contribute a 5% non-federal match.
- Equipment purchases will be considered for each grant category. The piece of equipment must be identified in the grant application as essential to the project and it must be 100% trail-related for trail construction or trail maintenance. *Please reference the Equipment Purchases section on page 6-7 for detailed provisions.*
- Environmental Review Documents and Support Letters are valid for up to three years if you have no variations (no changes in your project scope) from previous grant applications
- \$1,320,000 Available (anticipated amount) for Recreational Trails grants

If you have questions or concerns regarding any aspect of your application, please don't hesitate to call Beth R. Shumate (444-4585) of the Recreational Trails Program.

The Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA21) established the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), which provides for the transfer of federal gas taxes paid on non-highway recreational fuel used in off-highway vehicles to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) administers the RTP funds at the state level, while the FHWA provides program oversight at the federal level. RTP funding is currently made available through the federal program titled, "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century. The acronym for this program is MAP-21.

RTP grant applicants (sponsors) can include federal, state, county or municipal agencies, private associations and clubs. RTP grants to sponsors may not exceed 80% of the total of an individual project. After approval of all required documentation, FWP will reimburse the sponsor for 80% of the actual documented costs incurred. Reimbursement of RTP funds will only be approved for project expenditures incurred after the date of the signed project agreement between the project sponsor and FWP.

Compliance with Existing Laws, Management Authority Regulations, Policies and Ordinances

All projects seeking funding from the RTP Program must comply with existing federal, state and jurisdictional laws, regulations and ordinances. All projects, with the exception of brochures, portable exhibits and displays must satisfy the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Sponsors should pay special attention to the public comment requirements. <u>Please note that grant applicants are no longer required to post a legal notice for a 30-day public comment period to apply for an RTP grant.</u> Public involvement required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act will be satisfied by FWP. FWP will initiate a programmatic public involvement process after all grant applications are reviewed and tentatively approved.

FWP still encourages public involvement in all of its grant-funded trail projects. The general public, adjacent landowners, and other interested parties should be involved from the onset. Promotion of public participation may be through newspaper articles and any other means available, such as public meetings, federal quarterly newsletters, TV programs, radio announcements, etc.

<u>Environmental Review Requirements</u>: Applicable environmental laws must be satisfied by the sponsor and land management agency involved in the project whether that project is on federal, state, county, city or private land. However, several changes to our grant application procedures relative to environmental compliance were implemented in FY2013. We believe these changes will simplify the grant application process and make it easier for most applicants. In this discussion, MEPA refers to the Montana Environmental Policy Act, which is State Law, and NEPA refers to the National Environmental Policy Act, which is Federal Law.

Two changes to our grant application procedures relative to environmental compliance were made in 2012. 1) The first was a legislative action, in which House Bill 225 was passed and signed into law. This law exempts Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks from environmental compliance when it provides funding assistance to a 'snowmobile area operator.' The only exception is when a proposed grooming project has not been previously subjected to

environmental review or when there is a change to the action or the use of the award. In short, most snowmobile clubs will not be required to submit MEPA environmental analyses in applications to the Recreational Trails Program. Other types of projects that are exempted from completion of an environmental review: ethics or safety education; brochures; and, portable exhibits and displays. 2) Project applicants can "tier" from an approved federal environmental analysis. Because federal and state agencies are required to coordinate with each other and each may 'tier to' or adopt by reference the other's approved environmental review, RTP grant applicants with projects occurring on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) or other federal property, can now often satisfy MEPA requirements "by reference." This new process is limited to projects that have been cleared by the USFS and other federal agencies because the NEPA analysis has already been completed or because the category of work to be conducted is covered by a NEPA categorical exclusion. Please refer to the *Environmental Tiering Form* in the "Forms" section of the webpage if you intend to "tier" off a NEPA document.

Applicants that do not fall under the category of 'snowmobile area operator', are still required to submit appropriate environmental review documents. For most applicants, the MEPA/NEPA Environmental Checklist must be submitted.

Note: Dated MEPA/NEPA Checklists or other environmental forms are good for <u>three</u> years. If the proposed project is exactly the same as submitted in previous applications (no variations in your project scope), the MEPA/NEPA Checklist and associated documents may be used with this application.

USFS and BLM "Trail Steward" Applications

Trail Steward projects remain capped as in previous grant cycles at \$16,000/position. Approved grant funding for Trail Steward projects will cover salaries and travel per diem only. As a reminder, all federal project sponsors must contribute a 5% non-federal match. We encourage partnering with local trail organizations and clubs that could assist with in-kind contributions.

Planning, Design, and Feasibility Studies

Federal Highway Administration Guidance will only allow a "small" portion (less than 20%) of a grant to be used for planning, design or feasibility studies associated with a recreational trail project. According to Recreational Trails Program Guidance, Section 206(h)(1)(C) allows preapproval project planning and environmental compliance costs to be credited toward the non-Federal share of the cost of a project, limited to costs incurred less than 18 months prior to project approval. The costs incurred must be costs that would be allowable if the project had been approved. This provision helps project sponsors cover significant up-front costs incurred prior to project approval. The 18 month limit is intended to assure that planning and environmental documentation are still valid. The limit also encourages timely project approval.

If your project includes construction or improvements along any State Highway Right of Ways (RoW), the project sponsor <u>must</u> contact their local Montana Department of Transportation office and follow all RoW requirements. FHWA Office of Real Estate Services published <u>Real</u> <u>Estate Acquisition Guide for Local Public Agencies</u>. This will be helpful for any local public agency

acquiring land using Federal-aid highway program funds (including TAP or RTP funds). See Realty related documents at www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/index.htm.

Legal Easements

If the proposed project is not entirely on public land and crosses private property, the applicant must include an owner-signed legal easement or lease agreement that will be valid for a minimum of 15 years. RTP grant recipients are required to follow the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. Implementation regulations are found in 49 CFR Part 24 (see link below).

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/fapg/cfr4924a.htm

Application Guidelines for Indirect Costs

Please refer to the Indirect and Direct Costs Guidelines document under the Information Section to determine eligible costs for your project.

http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/rtpGrants.html

Application Guidelines for Snowmobile and Ski Clubs

Fish, Wildlife & Parks implemented a snowmobile trail groomer reimbursement methodology that employs an hourly rate based on expenditures for fuel, oil, maintenance, repairs, etc. FWP will reimburse snowmobile and cross-country ski clubs for all expenditures associated with grooming operations through the hourly rate.

- Costs included: repairs, maintenance (including maintenance labor), costs associated with transportation of groomers, fuel, oil.
- Costs not included: labor to operate machine and any other costs not associated with actual operation of the equipment.

Labor and other costs (i.e. signs, weed spray) not directly associated with operation of a snowmobile trail groomer are reimbursed under previously approved methods.

Hourly Rates

Utility Sled Used for Trail Grooming: \$20.00 per hour (does not include grooming labor) All Other Large Groomers: \$60.00 per hour (does not include grooming labor)

RTP grant sponsors are reimbursed for trail groomer expenses at \$20 or \$60 per hour of trail groomed, according to the groomer's hour meter or record of hours. These rates are used in lieu of receipts for fuel, oil, maintenance, repairs, etc. Labor and other eligible costs not directly associated with operation of the snowmobile trail groomer are reimbursed under standard and previously approved methods.

It is very important that each club documents hours and miles groomed using Snowmobile Program record sheets or similar reporting forms (daily grooming logs and monthly summary sheets).

Fiscal Year 2014 Recreational Trails Program grant applicants will need to comply with these reimbursement requirements in order to receive grant funds for grooming operations. All clubs need to submit project cost tables based on the above explanation.

Application Limitations

An applicant may submit only one grant application per grant cycle. An application may contain more than one project phase. If the application contains more than one distinct project phase, the applicant must prioritize these phases.

Any applicant with an RTP grant approved prior to 2011 that has not yet completed that project is not eligible to apply for an FY 2014 grant.

Grant Categories

The following RTP grant categories are offered.

- The **Small Grant** category comprises sponsors requesting \$20,000 or less per grant application. This category assists grant applicants with fewer grant-writing resources or smaller projects.
- The **Standard Grant** category includes sponsors requesting \$20,001-\$45,000.
- In the spirit of helping one or more RTP grant applicants move closer to the goal of completing a trails project, one or two **Big Grants** of \$90,000 are also available each RTP grant round.
- For trails large enough to have regional significance in Montana, such as rail-trail projects, or large maintenance projects, the Special Set-Aside Grant is available. We are pleased to announce that we have approximately \$150,000-\$200,000 available for a Set-Aside Grant for FY 2014. A prospective applicant must contact the Trails Office to provide a brief overview of its project as soon as practical. All prospective applicants will receive input as to whether a proposed project has merit before the time-consuming process of grant writing is initiated.

Sponsors must provide all information requested and submit the application by the March 1, 2014 application deadline. Only one grant application per grantee (organization) will be accepted. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered for funding.

Deadline: Your RTP Application Must Be Submitted by 4:00 p.m. on March 1, 2014!

Equipment Purchasing Guidelines

2014 Application Guidelines (NEW)

- Under federal RTP guidance, the purchase of recreational trail construction and maintenance equipment is allowed.
- Depending upon the equipment purchase applications received and the merits of individual proposals, RTP funds <u>may or may not</u> be allocated for equipment purchases in a given RTP funding cycle.
- RTP purchased equipment may include, but is not limited to; Utility Terrain Vehicles (for weed control and general trail maintenance efforts), trail grooming machines, and other equipment that can be demonstrated to be <u>solely utilized</u> to construct and maintain recreational trails or very specific trail-related features.
- The proposed piece of equipment MUST be identified in the grant application <u>as</u> <u>essential</u> to the project and it must be 100% trail related for trail construction and/or trail maintenance for the life of the piece of equipment.
- For the purposes of the RTP grant program, 'equipment' is defined as an article of nonexpendable, tangible, property having a useful life of more than one year and with an acquisition cost which exceeds \$1,000.
- A reminder that the <u>purchase of small tools utilizing RTP grant funds remains ineligible</u>.
 This includes such items as: shovels, rakes, chainsaws, backpack sprayers, hard hats, axes, pulaskis, etc.
- For the 2014 RTP grant cycle, the following equipment purchase expenditures will be considered:
 - 1. Five (5) equipment purchases will be considered for the 'Small Grant' category (a purchase of \$20,000 or less).
 - 2. One (1) equipment purchase will be considered for the 'General Grant' category (a purchase value of \$45,000 or less).
 - 3. One (1) equipment purchase will be considered for the 'Big Grant' category (a purchase value of \$90,000 or less).
- A project sponsor can apply for an equipment purchase in any one of the above categories, and a trail project (i.e. grooming operations, maintenance of an existing trail, etc.) in the same RTP funding cycle.
- For approved equipment purchase grants, project sponsors must follow State Purchasing Procedures during the purchasing process.

- Depending upon the specific approved equipment purchase for an RTP grant sponsor, a
 life-cycle will be assigned, which will then become part of the RTP Agreement (Section
 8.f.). This will be a minimum of five (5) years, and may be as great as (15) years. The
 grant sponsor must be in agreement with the assigned life cycle prior and as a condition
 of the award of the grant funds.
- For any approved equipment purchase over \$15,000, the project sponsor will be responsible for liability insurance coverage. The insurance coverage shall be adequate to cover the replacement of the equipment for the term of the life-cycle assigned to it and documented in the RTP Agreement.
- Should a project sponsor sell or otherwise cause a piece of approved equipment to not reach its useful life (i.e. failure to carry adequate insurance coverage or failure to properly maintain or operate the equipment, etc.), the sponsor may be deemed ineligible for future RTP grant awards.
- A thorough maintenance plan and procedures explanation must also be included and will be scored. Project sponsors must provide a maintenance plan that considers both long-term and short-term maintenance.
- Equipment tracking—The grantee will be required to inventory the equipment and submit updated status reports (including pictures and proof of insurance) annually through the RTP WebGrants online system.